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ABSTRACT

This program, included in "Effective Reading Programs...," serves 450 students at Otero Junior College (La Junta, Colorado). One of the goals of the program, begun in 1969, is to permit the junior college to retain or even slightly increase its academic standards while, at the same time, admitting all students irrespective of their preparation. To improve the skills of students, a three-unit course in reading/study skills is offered. The goals of the students taking the course range from passing the GED examination to excelling in upper-level humanities courses. The initial phase of the course is a teacher-student interview for which the student assesses his or her own needs and goals. During the initial development of the individual program for that student, the instructor observes the student's skills and adjusts the instructor to remedy the deficits. The instructor always places a strong emphasis on supportive counseling so that the student's immediate academic needs are being met by the program. The program is designed to correct the skill deficiencies of those students who, prior to this program, had histories of dropping out or academic failure. It also serves many high-achievement students who take the course to work on specific skills. (TO/AIR)

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OTERO JUNIOR COLLEGE'S READING/STUDY SKILLS LABORATORY - A SUPPORTING SERVICE

Presentation Delivered at the Fifth Annual Conference
of the Western College Reading Association
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By

Michael E. Erickson
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Otero Junior College

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OTERO JUNIOR COLLEGE'S READING/STUDY SKILLS LABORATORY - A SUPPORTING SERVICE

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Otero Junior College, a rurally located Colorado community college serving approximately 900 students, operates under a liberal admissions policy. Needless to say, this state prescribed "open door" policy, more often than not, swings both ways; frequently resulting in a high rate of student attrition. This waste of human resource seems unavoidable when a significant number of entering students not only lack proficiency in the basic reading/study skills, but come from culturally different, under-employed families as well. To assist the identified "high risk" students from the Chicano, Black, and rural White populations of the area, the Reading/Study Skills Laboratory (DS 101) was set up under the Directed Studies Department (Flancher (5)). By being a part of a separate studies department, the skills lab avoids the "step-child" status common to those labs which are merely instructional extensions of academic departments (Kazmierski (12)).

Since reading/study skills is not a subject, but a cluster of extremely complex skills which recognizes no departmental, academic or subject-matter boundaries, the accountability of such a lab necessarily rests with the student, rather than with a particular discipline. Consequently, the overall purpose of our program is dual in nature. First, we strive in as short a time as possible to equip the individual with a degree of reading/study skill proficiency requisite to meet his present commitments. Second, we strive to increase his general reading ability by strengthening those skills whose deficit tends to inhibit full realization of potential. In short, our program because of its criterion-reference character is learning/learner oriented.

Essential Elements

The Essential Elements of our program are: Service, Individualization, Relevancy, and Autonomy.

Basically, we are service-oriented; structured to meet the needs of the students, the faculty, and the community. At times when an individual is experiencing severe difficulty in a specific area of reading/study skills, the lab takes on the semblance of a crisis clinic. By assisting the person through this immediate crisis, we not only help him improve his chances for meeting his obligations at the college, but help him regain his self-confidence as well.

Although DS 101 is primarily skill-oriented, its resources are also used to train student tutors. These students, in turn, provide tutorial service to individuals who are experiencing difficulties with the content/concept demands of the various disciplines on campus. They also help their *compadres* overcome the language barrier.

The intrinsic worth of the individual is respected through the use of individualized methods of instruction. Through individualization the importance of learner-participation in the formation and execution of effective learning activities is emphasized. The versatility achieved by determining behavioral objectives with each individual student and the use of a multimedia approach to satisfy these objectives greatly enhances the attitude of mutual respect. Needless to say, an approach in which the student and instructor play such active roles takes considerable time and effort; however, it is felt that the overall effect of such cooperation results in a more thorough commitment on the part of the learner. In general, the versatility that DS 101 has achieved through such individualization has led to increased interest on the part of the student body (13, 16, 17).

An aspect of relevancy is acquired by demonstrating through the purposive integration of learning activities with the actual materials used in the special disciplines that the skills the client learns in the lab situation can be applied toward the consummation of his present commitments. By arming our students, in this way, we maintain an aspect of relevancy so crucial to the success of a learning assistance program (Christ (1)).

The voluntary nature of the program also contributes to its success. The risks inherent in this prescribed freedom are minimized by the on-going diagnosis and continuous counseling which each client receives virtually every laboratory session. We feel that, if genuine learning is to ensue, then the individual must freely and actively enter into the contract. This expression of autonomy is an immeasureable asset.

Standardized Testing Inappropriate

Corrective programs at the college level which rely on the indiscriminate use of standardized reading tests for all prospective clients tend to have several detrimental effects which can adversely influence remediation. Such procedures can cause culturally alienated students who have had a long history of failure to become impatient and, at times, uninvolved in the program. These procedures can also intensify feelings of inferiority and alienation, thus perpetuating a crippling self-view.

It is also our understanding that the indiscriminate use of standardized instruments as a means of diagnosing or appraising the disabled reader is untenable (Durost (3)). What level test does one administer when the achievement level of the prospective clients can range anywhere from 4.0 to adult? (Goodwin (7)) The likelihood of a test designed for college or secondary use being appropriate for all is questionable. Hence, if grade placement is a poor indice of test level; what college could afford to purchase the barrage of test materials needed to satisfy its needs?

The following are some other pertinent questions raised when standardized instruments are used: Do reading tests measure skills or general knowledge? (Tuinman (25)) Does a standardized score of 10.2 made by Juanito and John signify comparable ability? Can one safely infer that a correct response or even pattern of correct responses is indicative of mastery? Or, does an incorrect response pattern indicate inadequate development? What part does test-sophistication, or the lack thereof, play in standardized test "results" and their interpretation? (18, 20, 26)

Apparently, then, our present standardized reading tests cannot adequately measure something as complex as the reading process. AT THE MOST, such instruments represent:

> "...*one* sampling of behavior, on *one* operational definition of that skill, under *one* specific set of conditions, at *one* particular point in a student's development..." (Farr (4) p. 52)

These tests measure the <u>product</u> rather than the *process*. In a service-approach laboratory designed to serve <u>all</u> students wishing to improve their reading/study skills, it is the process which is of prime importance. For this reason, standardized testing is inappropriate.

A Different Way

Instead of administering standardized reading tests to those seeking assistance, we go a different way. We start with the reading/study skill deficiency as presented in the initial questionnaire and interview. In this way, we begin immediately to help the client remedy his skill deficiencies. While observing and teaching, the instructor learns, firsthand, about the client's approach to reading; the skills apparently mastered and those in which remediation seems necessary. In this manner, diagnosis and instruction have a reciprocal relationship. This combining of diagnosis with instruction eliminates the gap between the obtaining of information and the using of it (Strang (23) p. 7-8). Through this on-going *diagnosis-prescription-evaluation*, the reading process can be effectively monitored and appropriate instruction initiated.

Each staff member must through the questionnaire and interview appraise the nature and extent of the reading/study skill deficiency as well as acquaint the client with the purpose and scope of the program. Understandably,

then, the Reading/Study Skills Lab relies heavily upon the instructor-diagnostician variable. For this reason, only individuals trained in the diagnosis and remediation of reading/study skills difficulties are recruited.

We feel the skills instructor who deals with the "new student" (Goodrich (6)) should, also, possess a cultural empathy, if not an identity with his clients. A genuine *simpatiá* is an essential quality. Too many corrective programs are staffed with academicians who view the so-called minority cultures as nothing more than pathological phenomena. To us the effective skills instructor is a subversive (15, 19). He is an advocate of the principle that teaching *causes* learning. If no learning occurs, no teaching has taken place (Rouecne and Herrscher (21) p. 24).

Evaluation

During the Summer thru Spring Quarters of the 1970-71 academic year, the Reading/Study Skills Laboratory was appraised from several different aspects. It was evaluated from the aspects of its institutional impact, client reaction, and economic efficiency.

Institutional Impact

DS 101's total enrollment for the academic year under consideration was 530. These figures are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Summer	Fall	Winter	Spring
77	175	147	131

The figures need some clarification: First, the enrollment shown reflects the number of persons served without respect to institutional credits earned on the basis of full-time equivalency (FTE). A student may enroll for one, two, or three credits each quarter. In addition, since maturity in reading/study skills is a hypothetical construct which can only be approximated, students are able to re-enroll in DS 101 for additional help. Consequently, subsequent quarter enrollment figures in some cases include those persons who returned for additional help in one or more areas of reading/study skill development. Although this kind of "recidivism" is a definite strength of a skill-oriented lab, it should be kept in mind while interpreting enrollment data.

Enrollment figures, also, omit individuals who came to the lab for assistance, yet did not officially enroll for credit. Many of these students came for help in the areas of effective listening, note-taking, test-sophistication and the like. After receiving this assistance, they simply terminated future participation.

Availability was another way institutional impact was appraised. The extent in hours per week which the facilities and instructors are available is a definte asset to a community junior college which serves both full and part-time students. These figures are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Availability: Man-Hours Per Week

Summer	Fall	Winter	Spring
30	52	52	48

One important indication of institutional impact is the steady decline of students in academic difficulty. Prior to the development of the Directed Studies Department of which the Reading/Study Skills Laboratory is an integral part, the average yearly percentage of students in academic difficulty was 39.5%. At the conclusion of the Spring Quarter 1971, two years after the establishment of the D.S. Department, the percentage of students in academic difficulty was 13.0%. Although it would be difficult to ascertain exactly what contribution DS 101 has made to this trend, it is felt because of the very nature of the reading/study skills and from the feedback of those students involved, much of this decrease can be attributed to DS 101 and its service approach.

Clientele Reaction

In an effort to maintain the program's responsiveness to client needs, the students are asked to evaluate both the course and the instructor at the end of every quarter. Judging from the comments made by the 493 clients responding, DS 101 met the needs and behavioral objectives of those enrolled.

Economic Efficiency

Judging from the number of persons served, the extent of availability and the low attrition rate 6.7%, the Reading/Study Skills Lab is efficient. Much of its frugality is a direct result of the individualized, prescriptive approach used. This individualization allows for a greater variety of materials in limited quantities to be purchased; thus, enabling a relatively inexpensive multimedia approach. The utilization of commercially available, nonconsumable skill development materials adds to the variety without overtaxing existing financial resources. The fact that the skills taught in DS 101 are used by our clients in the special disciplines throughout the college, only serves to underscore this efficiency.

Discussion

DS 101's service approach along with its individualized, prescriptive methods is instrumental in increasing Otero Junior College's responsiveness to an "open door" admissions policy and the problems inherent therein. Through the efforts of this supporting service, the culturally different, "high risk" students now have a chance to succeed: their success, testifying to the fact that the egalitarian principles under which a public community college functions are viable.

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